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FACT SHEET

January 2005

Violence Against Women Education Project

Domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are critical issues facing family, criminal, and juvenile courts in California. The Violence Against Women Education Project (VAWEP) is an initiative designed to provide the courts with information, technical assistance, educational materials and programs on the courts' role in responding to cases involving these issues. VAWEP is a project of the Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) and is being implemented in collaboration with the AOC Education Division/Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER). The project is funded by the Governor's Office of Homeland Security/Office of Emergency Services (OHS/OES) with resources from the federal Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). The project's planning committee, composed of judicial officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and attorneys with expertise in the field of domestic violence, victim advocates, and other experts, guides the project staff in identifying key training issues and developing appropriate educational programming. Efforts to develop and augment educational events and curricula related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are ongoing and are designed to be responsive to the identified needs of California courts.

Project Goals

The goals of VAWEP are to:

- Identify primary educational and information needs of the courts on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues;
- Initiate new and enhance existing judicial branch educational programming pertaining to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, including the delivery of regional training events;
- Develop and compile useful information for the courts on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues that relates specifically to California law;
- Institutionalize inclusion of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues in all relevant judicial branch education curricula, programs, and publications;

- Create incentives designed to increase attendance and participation in judicial branch education relating to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- Increase communication among courts regarding emerging promising practices for responding to cases involving domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- Provide jurisdiction-specific technical assistance on domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking issues of the greatest import to local courts; and
- Create educational tools that aid in the administration of justice for self-represented litigants in domestic violence cases.

Educational Events and Technical Assistance

Planned events include the following:

Domestic Violence Judicial Institute (Spring 2005)

The project will use a national interdisciplinary curriculum developed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Family Violence Prevention Fund and will present one educational program based on the curriculum. Modeled on earlier statewide events, the program will include workshops on fact-finding, judicial officers' roles in a community response to domestic violence, fairness and cultural issues in domestic violence cases, decision-making skills and enforcement, victim behavior, and perpetrator behavior. The program will also include sessions designed to engage judicial officers in practical courtroom exercises addressing the complexity of domestic violence cases and the specific issues facing California courts.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Courses at the Continuing Judicial Studies Program (CJSP) (January and April 2005)

Four courses on domestic violence and sexual assault issues will be convened during the Winter and Spring 2005 CJSP programs. Two courses on sexual assault will be held. The first, in January, will provide a basic overview of the issues and will offer information on voir dire and jury selection, evidence, the use of expert witnesses, offender characteristics, and special considerations for victims of sexual assault. The second course, to be convened in April, will be an advanced course that covers issues of the impact of DNA on sexual assault cases, offender characteristics and risk assessment, managing the media in high-profile sexual assault cases, sentencing issues, and issues related to the post sentencing management of sexually violent predators and mentally disordered sex offenders. Two courses on domestic violence will also be held. The first course, to be convened in January, will focus on domestic violence and

family law; the Spring CJSP course will address immigration issues in the context of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Courses, Cow County Judges Institute (May 2005)

A series of intensive workshops on both domestic violence and sexual assault will be offered to judicial officers attending the Cow County Judges Institute, an educational event designed for judicial officers in rural counties.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Courses, Judicial College (June 2005)

Courses on issues of both domestic violence and sexual assault will be delivered as part of the nationally recognized B. E. Witkin Judicial College of California, a program providing comprehensive education for all new superior court judges, commissioners, and referees. The courses will provide background information on domestic violence and guidance for judicial decision making in sexual assault cases.

Broadcast for Court Employees on Domestic Violence Issues (Summer 2005)

This broadcast will focus on the particular information needs of court employees who provide court services to parties in domestic violence cases. This session will be scheduled as part of an ongoing series of broadcasts designed specifically for court employees, including clerks and bailiffs, who have frequent contact with litigants in domestic violence cases. Court employees from as many as 200 downlink sites around the state will have access to these training events. The broadcast will serve as an interactive venue for delivering training on these important issues. Ideas for future broadcasts will also be generated from feedback on the broadcast.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Workshops at the 2005 Statewide Judicial Education Conference (September 2005)

VAWEP will offer a series of workshops on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault at the 2005 Statewide Judicial Education Conference. This conference will be attended by most of the judicial officers in the state, who can elect to attend these specific workshops as part of the larger event. The workshops will be attended by individual judges who might not ordinarily have access to educational programs on domestic violence and sexual assault.

Technical Assistance/Speakers Bureau Initiative (Ongoing in 2005)

VAWEP will provide targeted, local technical assistance to applicant courts that have an identified need for training. In the past, VAWEP has received many requests from courts about specific information needs, which can range from understanding warning signs for lethality in domestic violence cases to improving communication

between the many types of courts that may be involved in a particular case. The project will provide experts whose specialties will vary based on the need of the individual court. This will be accomplished by delivering a substantive expert to speak to the issues at hand, providing speakers with expertise in violence against women issues at related AOC trainings, or facilitating a peer-mentoring meeting in which courts come together to learn about individual best practices. Recipients of this assistance will be asked to evaluate the assistance they receive.

Curriculum Development and Publications

VAWEP is developing the following curricula, publications, and other resource materials:

Judges' Guide to Domestic Violence Cases—Revised 2005

VAWEP will produce an updated judges' guide. This practical judges' handbook consists of the following component parts:

- California Protective Orders
- Emergency Protective Order (EPO) Quick Reference Guide
- Firearms and Full Faith and Credit
- Immigration and Domestic Violence
- Stalking

The five components of this guide have been consolidated into one volume for easy reference and accessibility. They can also be used separately and will be updated separately. Each component focuses on the information, case law, and statutes that judicial officers need to know in the relevant subject area. The revised guide will be published, distributed to all judicial officers, and posted on a Web site designed for judicial officers.

Benchbook on Sexual Assault Issues

The project will publish, distribute, and post online a new practical benchbook for judicial officers on sexual assault issues. The benchbook will explain the legal issues related to sexual assault cases and will help judicial officers make effective and appropriate orders and decisions in these complex cases. Among the topics that will be included in the benchbook are relevant case law, evidence and expert testimony, sentencing, offender characteristics, and treatment of victims.

Annual Report and Fact Sheet

Project staff will develop an updated annual report and fact sheet that will highlight key efforts the project has undertaken as well as judicial and court responses to those efforts. These documents will be distributed to provide project information to judicial branch professionals and the public. As educational tools, they will highlight best practices and innovative approaches.

Training Curriculum for Self-Help Center Volunteers on Domestic Violence

Since an overwhelming majority of victims in domestic violence cases are not represented by counsel, VAWEP will develop a training curriculum for self-help center volunteers on specific issues related to domestic violence generally as well as on how to complete domestic violence forms. This curriculum will be a product that can also be used, at least in part, as a basic training tool by other court entities working with victims of domestic violence. The training materials that are developed as a result of this initiative will be made available to 58 family law facilitators and 10 additional self-help centers.

Interactive Forms Program for Victims of Domestic Violence

VAWEP will work with a consultant to develop an interactive forms program to help self-represented litigants, advocates, and court staff prepare forms, declarations, and orders in domestic violence cases. This effort will aid litigants in developing clear and complete declarations for the court that will meet legal requirements.

Publication of Statewide Strategic Plans on Domestic Violence Issues

In September 2004, VAWEP co-sponsored the Family Violence and the Courts: 10th Anniversary Conference, which brought together presiding judges, court executive officers, and other community partners to identify key objectives to enhance the courts' response in domestic violence cases. VAWEP will publish each court's implementation plan and a statewide summary of goals in one comprehensive volume—both to memorialize the courts' work for future use and to facilitate information sharing among the courts around the state on issues of common concern. The document will chart a course for implementing best practices in domestic violence cases and for allocating trial court funding to support these practices.

Further Information

For additional information about VAWEP activities, please contact:

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